

# Kisan एकजुटता

CENTER FOR NEW ECONOMICS STUDIES



ANATOMY OF A PROTEST MOVEMENT





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***"What kind of Government compels the Annadaatas (providers of food) to protest for a whole year? We will now only return when our demands are met." - A farmer at Ghazipur border***

Political demonstrations are a form of democratic expression in which people or organisations strive to correct perceived injustices in the political system. When a group of people protests, the rest of society joins in, either in favour or in opposition to the group. Many of these protests have aided in the demise of arbitrary views that are not meant for the welfare of the target groups. One such paternalistic approach of the Indian Government while passing the three controversial farm laws was met with the largest human protest in history.



***"We neither support nor oppose any party. We have opposed the policy. For the first time, we Indians have pushed back the efforts of the WTO. Until these [agricultural] udharikaran (liberalization) policies are taken back, we will not stop." -  
Manineo Chaturvedi, Ghazipur Border***

Since the 1990s, India's government has pushed toward deregulation and privatization, leaving farmers without top-down safeguards, and ambiguous about their products and profits. The Laws were seen as anti-farmer and serving to the interests of big capital. Private players could unfairly mark-up the prices using their resources and sell it back to the farmers with higher margins, with farmers getting nothing. MSPs were therefore essential—which to them, were threatened by the new laws.





It was the *Jathe Bandhiyans* (Kisaan sangathan/Farmer groups) who initiated the protests. They shunned their differences and came together, protesting outside places such as the DM's office and establishments that symbolised privatisation and commercialisation (shopping malls, petrol pumps owned by corporates, etc).







The protest sites included Tikri, Ghazipur, Pakora Chowk and Singhu Border. The Tikri camp was filled with different unions, namely the *Bharatiya Kisan Union*, *All India Kisan Sabha*, and the likes of *Jamindara Socialists Organisation* that ran awareness camps about farming and digital libraries to counter the ruling party's narrative.







Presence of *Nihangs*—Sikh warriors—in Ghazipur was symbolic. It showed the camp was protected and people could feel safe. Langars provided food arranged from the villages of the farmers themselves.







***“In our Lakhimpur, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, everyone comes together to take decisions.” - Ranjeet (farmer)***

This protest has made leftists, conservatives, and farmer's unions, all come together under the same cause. While some stages were decorated by the pictures of Bhagat Singh and Sardar Udham Singh, signifying martyrdom, some uniquely identified with their troops saluting their sacrifices with a 'Laal Salaam'. Sikh farmers from Punjab, have mostly spearheaded and coordinated the demonstrations.







***"Setting up protest camps at the border was beneficial because they [farmers] could easily escape the actions of the Delhi and the Haryana police by crossing the borders." - S Kaur at Tikri border***

Agricultural reforms have always been a contentious issue in Punjabi politics, both politically and socially. The 1907 Punjab Unrest, like the current protests, was centered on problems of agriculture and land, notably reform of land ownership regulations. Agriculture is entwined with the legacy of many Sikhs in India and throughout the world, and an attack on independent Punjabi farmers has been seen by many as an attack on Sikh culture and identity. This intrinsic Sikh spirit and culture of Sikh resistance continued to fuel mobilisation on the field, as indicated by rhetoric, symbols, observed on the ground.





***"There is no lack of Langar here. Some bring 50 bags of grain, and some bring 4-5...We have earned this money through our own labor and sweat: This is our funding." - A farmer at Ghazipur border***

The Sikh consciousness has resulted in langar (sustenance food) for both demonstrators and local residents. Throughout the day, improvised kitchens set up on the side of the road provide hot meals to farmers. Behind every farmer was also a lady who tended to the langar's flames. Elderly ladies manning tractors, mothers leaving young children at home, women camping without adequate personal hygiene-the hardships of sustaining a popular movement.







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